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Game of Thrones and the Background Behind Westeros

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Game of Thrones

Introduction

For my case study, I am going to be looking at *Game of Thrones* because not only is it my favorite television show but this show is one that is breaking records and putting out cinematic masterpieces that used to only be seen in films. *Game of Thrones* is a television show like no other because of its complex storylines, interesting characters, its use of special effects, and the fact that viewers can never predict what will happen next because they will be proven wrong with all the different twists that the creators put in. The television show first premiered back on April 17th, 2011 and will be airing its final season in 2019. The most recent season ended on August 27th, 2017. In my opinion, I believe that this show is one of the best shows that is currently on television right now because it has something for everyone, between the violence, the drama, fantasy, adventure, twists in the plot that people don't see coming, and so much more. *Game of Thrones* is so successful and unique because the story transfers you into another world that you want to be in and you are always emotionally invested in what happens. The character complexity is something that you look forward to and character development is amazing. George R.R. Martin is responsible for the creation of *Game of Thrones* since he created the book series *A Song of Fire and Ice*. There are seven books that make up the series “*A Game of Thrones* that came out in 1996, *A Clash of Kings* that came out in 1998, *A Storm of Swords* that came out in 2000, *A Feast of Crows* that came out in 2005, *A Dance with Dragons* that came out in 2011, *The Winds of Winter* that hasn't been published yet, and *A Dream of Spring* that also hasn't been published yet” (goodreads.com, 2017). But let's get some background information about how the show got started and who is behind it all.

George R.R. Martin decided to write his series *A Song of Fire and Ice* wishing that no one would want to go near it since he worked as a TV writer he knew what would happen. He wanted to create a novel that could not be filmed but that doesn't mean that others didn't try to get Martin to agree with making his novel a film. Benioff and Weiss come around and had a different idea because they wanted to make it a television show so they met with Martin to convince him. “But, reportedly, the author wasn't convinced until the duo was able to accurately answer one question: Who is Jon Snow's mother?” (Bustle, 2016). Once they correctly answered the question they pitched the series to HBO, since the network had similar violent shows playing they knew they wanted HBO to air the series. The issue with the book series is that Martin is taking his time to finish the sixth novel and the show had been affected by it since the show creators didn't have a storyline to follow. They only had the first five novels to base the show off of after that they had to guess where Martin was going with his characters. David Benioff and D.B. Weiss are the masterminds behind the television show. Benioff read the novel and got his friend Weiss to help him since he knew it was something that had to be told visually. They tried to make it a film first but realized that the majority of it would have to be cut out to fit into a film screen time so they set out to make it a television show instead. Since this television show is shown in 170 countries, it has a lot of production and distribution companies, but in the United

States “Home Box Office more commonly known as HBO is both the production company and the distribution company behind this television phenomenon” (IMDb.com, 2017). Since airing in 2011, *Game of Thrones* has been nominated 422 times and won 250 awards coming from various countries such as the U.S., the U.K., Ireland, and Australia. The show has given various people accolades for what they have done for the show.

Political Economy

Game of Thrones is a show like no other. I have never seen a show that captivates audiences like this show does. Every little aspect about this show is analyzed by fans because they are trying to figure out the significance of it. This show has changed the way television is perceived because before this show, television was seen as the small screen compared to films, but now television is seen in the same category as film. While I’d like to think, it is because of the popularity of *Game of Thrones*, I know it is because of the people behind the shows, that most people don’t know such as the creators or the writers. This relates to political economy in terms of media because the audience is looking into how the show is produced, distributed, and consumed by themselves. Understanding this particular definition of political economy is necessary for a holistic understanding of media because that is where the audience can grasp what individual components make up the media text, or in this case, the show and how the individual components affect the show’s creation. This gets a person thinking about who exactly is pulling the strings behind the show.

I’d like to thank a few people who are responsible for creating *Game of Thrones* because without them *Game of Thrones* wouldn’t be possible. George R.R. Martin created the whole idea of the novel back in 1996. George R.R. Martin especially has Bantam Spectra and HarperCollins to thank for believing that his novel should be published and sold in bookstores. Bantam Spectra is the science-fiction division of Bantam Books, which is a subsidiary of Penguin Random House. Bantam Books is the publisher for the novels in the United States and HarperCollins is the publisher for the books in the United Kingdom. George R.R. Martin also has HBO to thank for broadcasting his hit television show on Sunday nights whenever the season airs. HBO airs the show on their channel but HBO also streams the show on its streaming service, HBOGO. According to Foster and McChesney, “the Internet adds to the mix what economists term ‘network effect,’ meaning that just about everyone gains by sharing use of a particular service or resource” (The Internet’s Unholy Marriage to *Capitalism*, 47). HBOGO provides all of HBO’s television shows and movies that it has on its network, so people can watch shows that are off the air. This streaming service also puts the show’s that are in season on the website at the exact same time the show is airing on the network. What is great about the streaming service is that let’s say, you don’t have HBO on your television but you have an account on HBOGO then you can watch your show on your laptop or smart TV. The Internet also provides *Game of Thrones* fans a place to connect to talk about the show such as Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook. The Internet provides a new way to watch the show and for people to connect than they did about ten years ago. The Internet also ruins the show because you can never go on social media during the show or if you haven’t watched it yet since people live tweet what happens and they spoil it for you. George R.R. Martin also has Warner Bros. Television Distribution for distributing the show out on DVD, since Warner Brothers and HBO are under the Time Warner umbrella, which I will

get to later. Martin also has many production companies to thank for filming the show and they include Television 360, Grok! Television, Generator Entertainment, Startling Television and Bighead Littlehead.

Game of Thrones is breaking records all the time, whether it be how many people watch the show on one night or the winningest drama series in Emmy history. Since this show has aired six years ago, it has been creating structural trends in the media industry as well as breaking records. Since *Game of Thrones* has aired many companies have taken notice of how popular HBO has become and now people want to be a part of it or in this case they want to own it. AT&T has made a \$85.4 billion bid to buyout Time Warner but that was back in 2016 and now it has been at a standstill for the last 8 months. AT&T is not only buying HBO but all of Time Warner's entities. If it goes through this deal will be big for the internet and entertainment industries. *The New York Times* reported that "the Justice Department officials still don't have a boss who will have the final say on whether to approve or block the deal. President Trump's pick for assistant attorney general in charge of antitrust matters, Makan Delrahim, has been held up in a logjam of nominees in the Senate" (Kang & Merced, 2017), which is why they are at a standstill. Integration is a very big part of Time Warner and how they run their company. The mergers that Time Warner has done since it became a big media conglomerate also have helped it maintain its vastly huge concentration of ownership and it helped make it one of the big six media conglomerates. According to Croteau and Hoynes "the new media giants have integrated either horizontally by moving into multiple forms of media such as film, publishing, radio, and so on, or vertically by owning different stages of production and distribution, or both" (*The New Media Giants Changing Industry Structure*, 23). Time Warner has both horizontal and vertical integration and they can be seen through its three divisions, HBO, Turner Broadcasting, and Warner Bros. HBO and Turner Broadcasting have their own original programs and platforms. HBO and Warner Bros. have their own film subdivision with HBO showing it on its channel and Warner Bros showing feature films in theaters. Warner Bros. is its own production and distribution company, as well as owning its own record label and comic books. Time Warner has done well with globalization because it has streaming services and channels in foreign markets such as Central Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Southeast Asia. HBO is licensed to television networks in over 170 countries worldwide and it has online streaming in those countries as well. Time Warner displays concentration of ownership because of its mix of cable television, films, and print media increases its ownership in all branches of media.

Game of Thrones has a lot of people behind the scenes who make the show what it is. David Benioff and D.B. Weiss are the showrunners of *Game of Thrones* and they have creative control over the scripts and storylines. Although the show is based off the books, Benioff and Weiss had to create their own plot progressions since the rest of the novels aren't finished yet. Seasons seven and eight are all new material that they wrote but that doesn't mean that Martin doesn't have a bit of control with that either. Benioff and Weiss have to guess what is going to happen and Martin tells them if they are correct or not. The show does follow the novels but Benioff and Weiss get to add their own twists. With a show like *Game of Thrones*, since there are so many seasons, it is difficult to pick out if there is an auteur or not because all the episodes have different directors and writers. But IMDb has helped me see that David Benioff and D.B.

Weiss have written 73 episodes of the series compared to five of the other writers including George R.R. Martin who wrote 67 episodes. Benioff and Weiss are the showrunners, who in this case are the auteurs, because they are more involved in the show than other people and their writing is what makes the show. The plotlines, storylines, and character development are what draws audiences in besides the special effects.

Game of Thrones is a very interesting show with all the insane plotlines, developed character developments, detailed special effects, and a universe that is so different than our own. On IMDb, *Game of Thrones* is categorized into the adventure, drama, and fantasy genres, but I would also add serial genre into the mix. I think the adventure genre accurately describe this show because the characters are on a quest to be on the Iron Throne and they travel to fictional places such as Winterfell, Casterly Rock, King's Landing, The Wall, Dragonstone, and many more, so they are going on an adventure. For the drama genre, this show has it in boat loads. Everyone is facing drama to get to the Iron Throne like whose brother killed their father and they now want their brother dead, whose husband died because of witchcraft, or whose son killed himself because his mother blew up his wife and her family plus half of the city's citizens. The major drama that happened this season was confirmed during the last season that people have been speculating for about two or so seasons. The fantasy genre fits this show because they incorporate magic, dragons, the undead, and other elements that are found in the fantasy genre. Pixomondo, who controls all the special effects on the show, help give the show its fantasy genre. They are a very important part to the show because their work is a part of what makes the show including how they create the amazingly realistic dragons that are a major to the show and how they add all the extra people in the major battles. They create so much little details in the dragons that truly make the show cinematic. The serial genre is where a show has continuing plot that unfolds in a sequential episode-by-episode fashion, which *Game of Thrones* does because the show continues the plots from the episode before into the next episode. I think Creeber said it best though when he quoted Lacey in his research "the 'repertoire of elements' that serve to identify genres consists of character types, setting, iconography, narrative and style" (*Introduction: What is Genre?*, 5). The genres that make up this show portray this definition because the characters are strong and fictional, the settings reflect the adventure genre with people traveling to all the medieval and ancient castles and the European locations, the iconography is represented perfectly for the fantasy genre with the dragons, the narrative is represented by the adventure storyline of everyone wanting the Iron Throne for various reasons, and the style of the show reflects the fantasy genre with the locations being a main focal point of the series along with the dragons once they became a part of the narrative. *Game of Thrones* does a good job of staying in these genres throughout all the seasons and they don't stray away from it. Genres play an important role in identifying what the television show or film is going to be about or at least have elements of that genre so with the genres that *Game of Thrones* are it is a bit surprising that people are obsessed with it because there are people who strongly dislike fantasy films, books, or shows but love *Game of Thrones*. If you get people who generally don't like the fantasy or drama or adventure genre to come around and like it you must be doing something right.

There are some consequences to institutional trends that are visible and not visible in *Game of Thrones*. An institutional consequence that this show created is that David Benioff and D.B. Weiss are working together on a new TV series called *Confederate* that will air on HBO and people are excited for it. It seems that fans of *Game of Thrones* will watch *Confederate* based off the trend that Shonda Rhimes set with her “Thank God It’s Thursday” shows since people who watch one of her shows watch the other ones. The title sequence for *Game of Thrones* isn’t visible to the audience unless they did research because the title sequence changes depending on the locations that are visited in that particular episode. I never noticed that little detail before but I did my research and then I went and played the title sequences again and I heard the difference. This show has completely risen above the bar that other shows have set for industry and structural trends so now other shows are competing with *Game of Thrones* and some have come close but they can’t beat it. The amount of money that HBO is shelling out already brings *Game of Thrones* to another level and it sets the production trend. Other shows probably won’t match that much money on production or if they do the company that produces the show probably won’t make that money back like HBO does because the company won’t profit off of the show’s success like HBO does with *Game of Thrones*.

Textual Analysis

Game of Thrones is a show that just keeps getting better and more complex as the seasons go on. Every little detail plays an important role to the plot and will cause fans to question every little detail that they see. The questioning is normally along the lines of is that specific detail the one that will confirm the fan theories or if that detail will play a role in future episodes. Most fans don’t analyze the text to understand the deeper meaning behind it. Understanding textual analysis of the media that someone is watching is essential in understanding how other people view things that are happening in daily life. Creators of television shows and their writers use symbolism and representation of characters as ways to get people to notice things going on in the world around them and to have them see how it might affect them. But a viewer has to pay close attention and be able to understand why the creators and show writers do what they do to characters and what is around them. The symbolism isn’t lost and neither is the representation of certain character types in *Game of Thrones* and it is especially seen in all of the show’s sixty-nine episodes.

There are so many episodes that can be critically analyzed and it is so hard to choose from since every episode has some type symbolism or representation of certain character types! Each episode of the series represents character types differently and the symbolism gets more interesting as the show goes on. I finally came up with one after a very long inner debate with myself about whether I was going to write about my favorite episode to date. But I decided against that because I feel there is a better episode to analyze in terms of what we are looking for that will be explained later. I’m going to be talking about Season Three Episode Four “And Now His Watch Has Ended” which aired on April 21st, 2013.

Courtesy of IMDb, “And Now His Watch Has Ended” logline is “Jaime mopes over his lost hand. Cersei is growing uncomfortable with the Tyrells. The Night’s Watch is growing

impatient with Craster. Daenerys buys the Unsullied” (IMDb). Since the show has intertwining storylines it is a bit difficult to pinpoint the lead characters of the show because recurring characters become starring or main characters later in the season or in the next season. But I tried my best for this one because at this point in the season some secondary characters or characters that are recurring haven’t been given the green light to become starring or lead characters yet. So, the characters that I will be analyzing are Jaime, Cersei, and Margarey and Daenerys and each of their individual storylines for this episode since each of them belong to one of the main houses.

For Jaime’s storyline, he is the central figure to his text and Brienne of Tarth is his secondary figure. Brienne of Tarth adds to Jaime’s storyline she adds a bit of role reversal for the stereotypes of men and women. Jaime is the central figure because this is about him getting to deal with the after effects of him losing his right hand. Brienne is secondary because she is trying to help him find his fight again because he lost it once their captors cut off his right hand. Jaime believes that since he doesn’t have his right hand anymore that he doesn’t have the will to do anything because that was what made him who he was because he used that hand to kill the Mad King which gave him the nickname “Kingslayer” and he was respected because of that. Brienne tells him that he needs to go on so that he can get revenge on their captors once they get out of there. She also tells him to stop whining, crying, and to not quit at believing that they will make it out of there alive. This is a nice role reversal that the writers showed because it contradicts historical trend in how people perceive women and men roles in television. Historically, women are seen as the damsel in distress and they are always seen as the “Debbie downers” while the men are seen as strong and will pick up the pieces so to speak, but in this storyline the roles are reversed and those roles are contradicted. Brienne is the one who is strong and is picking up the pieces for Jaime who is depressed because he no longer has the one thing that he believes defines him. Jaime is the one who is acting like the damsel in distress who needs to be saved from himself.

For Cersei’s storyline, she is the central figure and Margarey Tyrell, Olenna Tyrell, and Joffrey Baratheon are the secondary figures. Cersei has finally found two women who are as conniving and manipulative as her. She essentially met her match with Margarey and Olenna coming into her kingdom because Margarey is arranged to be married to her son, Joffrey. What is interesting is that Margarey and Olenna are testing Cersei in different ways because Margarey is testing Cersei through her power over her son while Olenna is testing Cersei through their common interest of how women should rule. Rosalind Gill said it best “... the major contemporary shift in the sexual representation of women: the construction of a young, heterosexual woman who knowingly and deliberately play with her sexual power...” (*Supersexualize Me!*, 256). Margarey is very pretty and she knows it and she also knows that Joffrey thinks she is pretty so she uses it to her advantage to get what she wants. Margarey wants to be queen of the seven kingdoms just like Cersei does so she uses her attractiveness to get the prince because he inherited the Iron Throne after his father died. Whenever Margarey is around Joffrey he does anything that she says because he is infatuated with her compared to when she wasn’t in the picture Cersei told her son what to do and he listened to her. Cersei doesn’t like Margarey because she sees the power Margarey has over her son and she is trying everything

that she can to stop it. While Cersei is worried about Margarey's power over her son she also has to deal with Margarey's grandmother, Olenna. Olenna is playing a game with Cersei about appealing to Cersei on a leadership level. Olenna and Cersei are talking and they come up to the topic of rulers and Olenna mentions that she doesn't understand why men are rulers even though women are smarter. Olenna is appealing to Cersei since Olenna can tell Cersei wants to be queen. Both women want to see a woman on the Iron Throne, the only difference is that Cersei sees herself sitting on the throne while Olenna sees her granddaughter. Cersei is a manipulating and conniving woman who will do whatever it takes to remain in power. Margarey is an attractive and conniving young woman. Olenna is a conniving older woman. These women play into the stereotype of women who will use or do whatever it takes to get what they want and that they don't care who they hurt along the way. These roles support the historical negative trends in representation of women in media because it shows that women want one thing and they only want that one thing. They will do anything to get what they want. These characters also represent the negative representation of pinning women against each other and having them act one way in the presence of each other and then when they are away from each other act another way. This is also seen throughout the series with Cersei and other characters.

For Margarey's storyline, she is the central figure and her brother, Loras Tyrell and Sansa Stark are the secondary figures. Margarey is talking to Sansa about wanting to be sisters and that she could marry her brother Loras and then rule over Highgarden, the Tyrell's home. Sansa says that she would love it because just like Joffrey she is infatuated with Margarey and wants to be like her. Sansa also wants to be princess and she was going to be Joffrey's but then Maragray came along and changed that. This scene doesn't show the whole picture because there is something about Loras that the audience knows that this point but everyone else besides Margarey and Olenna know, which is that Loras is gay but he is hiding it. *Game of Thrones* does a good job in what Hart describes as the fourth stage of representation when he states: "... respect – members of the social group are presented in the complete range of roles, both positive and negative, that their members actually occupy in real life" (*Representing Gay Men on American Television*, 598). Even though Loras is technically in the closet the representation of gay roles is evident because the creators of the show include gay characters on the show. Loras isn't the only gay character but each gay character that is on the show represents both negative and positive stereotypes of gay people. Loras isn't coming out of the closet fully, since his family knows but not everyone else he meets, but he does have a guy that he spends time with. This representation supports the historical trend that being gay is something that you should hide because it will be bad for your family if you come out of the closet. The Tyrell's want to be on the Iron Throne and if Loras comes out as gay that will jeopardize their chances. Later, in a few more episodes, everyone finds out about Loras and Loras is put on trial in front of the high Sparrow and is forced to become Brother Loras. This representation supports the historical representation that if you come out as gay there will be consequences. The other representations of gay people in *Game of Thrones* contradict the old historical trends and support current historical trends because Yara Greyjoy is a lesbian character and she is very open with it. She is celebrated because the creators created a character that people can resonate with and it shows that people can be accepting of gay people.

For Daenerys' storyline, she is the central figure and Kraznys and the Unsullied are the secondary figures. Daenerys is a character that empowers women because she represents that women can be heads of their households and she doesn't need a man to make decisions for her she goes out and makes her own decisions. She shows us that we have to move forward and build our empire which is exactly what she is doing when she goes to Astapor. Daenerys is in Astapor to trade one of her dragons, Drakharys, to Kraznys in exchange for his Unsullied army. The Unsullied are slaves and Hall describes the slave figure as "... dependable, loving in a simple child-like way... Devoted and childlike, the 'slave' is also unreliable, unpredictable and undependable" (*The Whites of Their Eyes*, 106-107'). The scene starts out with Kraznys speaking in his native tongue, Valyrian, and saying derogatory names about Daenerys while discussing their trade. Daenerys gives Kraznys Drakharys and he gives her the whip that is used to control the Unsullied. Daenerys walks over to the army and speaks Valyrian to them and they listen to her. Kraznys doesn't hear her speak Valyrian and then says that the beast, meaning dragon, won't come to him. Daenerys speaks to Kraznys in Valyrian and tells him that the dragon is not a slave and that Valyrian is her mother's native tongue. Kraznys is in shock because he didn't know that she speaks Valyrian. Daenerys then turns to her army and tells them to kill all their slave masters and anyone that holds a whip but to spare the children. The Unsullied obey her and Kraznys is horrified and tries to stop them but Daenerys orders Drakharys to kill him, so Kraznys is burned alive. Once the Unsullied killed all their slave masters and anyone holding a whip. Daenerys frees them and tells them that they can remain free with her or they can leave the army. Not a single soldier leaves her and they all tap their spears on the ground in unison to show their support for her and then they all leave Astapor together as one united free front. At this point in the scene the Unsullied fit into what Hall described as the third stage of representation "...regulation, members of the social group are presented as protectors of the existing social order" (*Representing Gay Men On American Television*, 598). They fit because they represent the social order of an army since they fight for someone, in this case a master, and they obey orders given to them by the "master" that they are fitting for. This scene contradicts the historical trends of representation for women because it shows that a woman can lead and she can do it without a man. When I first watched this episode when it aired I didn't notice a key thing with the Unsullied, I only noticed it when I read about it later. The men in the Unsullied army are all black and their savior is white. I wasn't really thinking about it when I first saw it because I was more focused on how Daenerys put Kraznys in his place and how she told Drakharys to kill him. This representation of slavery unfortunately supports historical trends in representation. I don't think that the creators planned it this way, I think it was just an unfortunate coincidence.

There are some consequences of these semiotic and ideological messages because each representation that the *Game of Thrones* creators have given all reflect the trends and stereotypes differently. The representations shown in this show either contradicts or supports historical trends of representations of various groups. I think that is important because the creators are showing that they can be diverse in their ideas for representation and they can break out of the stereotypes that previous media have created. How they represent gay characters is something that is unique because whenever there is a gay character people aren't bashing the character but rather they are embracing the character and eagerly wait until the next episode to find out what that character will do. This show's representation of women is highly praised because the female characters either have extremely good character development or they are just badass. They really

show you that women can do the same things as a man and majority of the time women can do it better. I really like how they represent men because they show both sides of a man, the dominant strong side and the sensitive side. Each character type is represented in this show, whether or not the viewer notices is a different story because the representation can be easily portrayed as a character flaw or the actor does such a good job with it that people just think it is a part of the character's personality. *Game of Thrones* is not only breaking records but it is changing the game in how we view representations of groups in the media and it is paving the way for other shows to do the same.

Audience Analysis

Game of Thrones is a show that captivates audiences every second to where they can't stand waiting for the next episode. But what makes the show besides the special effects, the multiple thoroughly developed plot lines and characters, is the people who watch it. You can go anywhere and find people talking about this show and can easily start up conversations with strangers about the latest episode. The audience enhances the experience because the viewers are so involved in the show and they are extremely passionate about it. Understanding how audience analysis is necessary for a holistic understanding of media because it is important to understand how audiences encode the media that they are viewing. They either encode it by interpreting media the way that the media creators wanted, interpret the media in a different way than the creators wanted, or they accept some of what the creators wanted and not the rest of what they created. Knowledge of this makes it easier for people to interpret, analyze, and criticize media and its messages. There are also different approaches on how to understand audience and that is by Hall's audience positions, that I mentioned above, and through audience research by measuring ratings, seeing where the audience cultivates together through in person interactions or online interactions, and the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Each of the different approaches mentioned give a different look into how audiences are measured by the media industry and how it affects the type of medium that the audience views.

According to Dan Selcke from winteriscoming.net, the target audience for this show is "18-29" from his pie chart that 4,380 people voted in and in his other pie chart it shows that "81.8%" of the show's audience is male based off those same people that voted (*What Are Game Of Thrones Fans Like?*). While this shows the exact demographics of the target audience, there are older and younger males and females that make up the *Game of Thrones* fandom. This fandom has a certain identity that will do anything that involves this show whether it be going to pop-up bars decorated like the show, buying merchandise from the show, following the actors on social media platforms, or attending ComicCon dressed in costumes from the show. Fandoms help make the show what it is and this fandom is dedicated and willing to show their support and knowledge for the show. This is why I decided to speak to people to get their viewpoints on *Game of Thrones*.

I conducted a focus group with a few of my bosses at The Factory on campus who watch the show, Jim O'Connor who is 27, Aaron Briggs who is very old (he wouldn't give me age), and Kate Szewczyk, who is 22. They all attend Sacred Heart for their different programs because

Aaron and Kate are going for their M.B.A.s and Jim is going for his undergrad degree in Computer Science with the IT Cyber Security track. I conducted this interview during one of my shifts since it is quiet during certain hours. I noticed that each of the participants were very eager to help me out, but that might have to do with the fact that they got to talk about one of their favorite shows. They are all at different stages with *Game of Thrones* because Jim and Aaron have been watching it since it came out six years ago while Kate started binge watching it a month ago. They all got into *Game of Thrones* differently because Aaron and Jim have read the books while Kate only watched the show.

Throughout the interview, there were some themes that emerged but they all had different answers for questions and they bounced ideas off one another. This showed me that even though people's opinions about the show vary that people can still agree with certain things and add different points to the argument. Another key theme was how they answered their questions because the answers were detailed and they made the other interviewees think about how they were going to phrase their answer. They also spoke about how the anticipation for and the waiting until the next books come out reflect the show which is a topic among many other fans. They also had different reasons for why they loved the show and that showed me that the show reaches people on different levels, which is hard for a show to do especially for over seven years. But what stood out to me the most was that they brought up points about the show that I didn't think people would or that the points mattered that much to people besides the book and show discrepancy.

Jim, Aaron, and Kate are demonstrating what Jenkins described as "...fans passionately embrace favored texts and attempt to integrate media representations within their own social experience" (*Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten*, 69). They are taking the text, whether it be the books or the show, and bringing it into their social everyday experiences. They talk about it at work with their coworkers, in Kate's case she talks about it with her boyfriend, in Jim's case he talks about it with his wife and friends, and in Aaron's case he talks about it on Reddit. Since Aaron goes on Reddit to talk about the show, it shows that the Internet plays an unexpected role for this show. Because of technology growing it only makes sense that the creators of the show and its fan would use it to its advantage. Technology is a way for people to interact with one another without actually meeting face to face and it makes talking about a show easier because people will constantly be bringing up new theories that people can provide feedback to in a matter of seconds. It also lets people from around the world talk about the show and give their new and different opinions about *Game of Thrones*. They talk about it with anyone that has watched the show or the books. They discuss fan theories, what they thought of the most recent episode, when they think the newest books are coming out, and that they can't wait until the final season comes out in 2019. I think Carr said it best when he stated, "Thanks to the Internet and cellular networks, humanity is more connected than ever" (*How Technology Created a Global Village*, 4). Technology, whether it be the TV, a streaming service, or the Internet, brings everyone together and keeps up connected since no one can go five minutes without using technology these days. It also makes it easier for people to incorporate the show in their everyday lives. They incorporate *Game of Thrones* into their lifestyle by wearing clothes that having sayings on it from the show, they have collectibles from the show on their desks, and they

quote the show at work. This just goes to show, once again, that other people are profiting off of the show's massive success.

After playing back the interview on my phone I noticed that there were some topics that all three agreed upon and topics that were similar. All three liked the fact that it was a fantasy genre show that the plots for the episodes were always well thought out. Kate and Jim agreed that the character development and the depth of the show is what helps make the show. They talked about gender roles in the show and I think Aaron said it best when he said, "I think they are pretty fluid, there is a lot of variety in the characters." Then Jim and Kate branched off that and stated how Daenerys is the "breaker of chains" so she is the perfect example of how gender roles are different in this show. Kate loves how there is a female eight-year-old who is leading a house of men all by herself. The way that they watch the show is similar because they watch it on HBO GO, well except for Aaron since he watches the show by illegal downloads. Another thing that was similar was how all three of them agreed that the representations of gay characters in the show. Once again, I think Aaron said it best when he said "It is fairly accurate as to medieval times and how people portrayed them... It is pretty fair characterization." Jim added to that by saying "It was frowned upon and pretty hush hush," which is how it is in the show. They also liked how the show isn't afraid to portray these types of characters. There really wasn't that much that they differed beside what they disliked about the show. The only thing was that Kate disliked that the show had so many characters that sometimes it can get confusing keeping up with all of them, while Aaron and Jim both agreed that a person can never have a favorite character because George R.R. Martin kills off all his characters.

Kellner stated "... thus it is important how to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages" (*Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture*, 7). That is exactly what Jim, Aaron, and Kate have done when they spoke about their criticisms of *Game of Thrones* and George R.R. Martin. Jim criticized the discrepancies between books that came out and show. Jim and Aaron want Martin to write faster and finish the books. Jim's reason behind it was that he wants Martin "to finish the stories so that we can get to the ending [in the books] before the show can get to the ending. He is going to see the ending happen before he can read the ending." Aaron also pointed out a fact that everyone has been talking about since the show went off track so to speak since the show is only based off the books up to an extent. Aaron said, "the books and the show should end at the same time," and Kate and Jim agreed that it would be cool if that happened. Jim explained to Kate that there are two books that she hadn't gotten to it in the show, that Martin split in half where you saw half the characters point of view and then the other book was the rest of the characters' point of views but that he is merging them all to keep them consist to the same major seven characters that are on the show. This was interesting to me because I haven't read the books (although they are on my list!) so it was fascinating to hear about the discrepancies that I had no idea existed. Aaron really understood and interpreted what they show tried to do with the different regions that I never really thought about. He said, "different regions will have different ideas," and that was regarding gay characters. That relates to real life because people in different regions have different ideas about all different types of things. I never really thought about how true that statement was until it was voice and it got me thinking about how the show handles other topics such as women in leadership. There are a few

rulers from different areas that don't think a woman should lead and then there are other rulers in other places that think a woman should lead. It all depends on the areas beliefs and that is parallel to certain topics in real life.

Based off the interview, I can conclude that *Game of Thrones* is a show like no other. It impacts people in different ways and it makes people want to find out what happens to the characters. The storylines are just so compelling that you can't stop watching the show or talking about it. *Game of Thrones* can captivate you through the screen or through the pages. People can make bonds because they watch the show or they can talk to people they meet on trains or talk to coworkers about the show. There isn't a person in this world who hasn't heard of *Game of Thrones* so there will always be someone in a room that is willing to talk about it with you. Two things that we all agreed on is that *Game of Thrones* draws you in and makes you feel like you are in their world. There aren't that many shows that can make you feel like you are in the universe of the show or that make you wish you were a Stark or a Lannister. *Game of Thrones* is one of the greatest shows out there and it's clear as to why.

Conclusion

The production trends of this show have a few consequences, but they all work out well for HBO and the franchise of the show. The production of *Game of Thrones* costs HBO a lot of money to produce, the sixth season alone for a single episode cost around \$10 million to produce while the previous seasons episodes cost \$4 million. *Indiewire* reports that "Season 8 will cost at least \$15 million, a price tag that could skyrocket even higher depending on re-shoots and additional VFX work. The number means HBO will spending \$90 million or more on the final season" (Sharf, 'Game of Thrones' Season 8: Each Feature-Length Episode Will Cost a Massive \$15 Million). Even though, HBO might be shelling out more money for the production aspect of this show they will be making it back in probably an episode or two because people buy the official *Game of Thrones* merchandise from HBO's store. People will pay for replica mugs from this show or swords because they are so invested in the show. This is HBO's best rated, viewed, and loved show since *The Sopranos*' so it won't hurt HBO if they spend more money on the production of the show. They have continued to make money off this show since it became insanely popular when it aired and it continues to get popular as more and more people watch it. Since season 8 is going to have six feature length episodes that will be longer than 80 minutes, which was the season 7 finale run time, they will generate more viewers and positive feedback from audiences that will make other people realize that they show watch the show. *Game of Thrones* streams on HBOGO during the season and anytime that someone wants to watch it. There is also going to be a spin-off but HBO still has to give the green light to one of them. Currently, there are five possible spin-off shows that HBO is looking into and HBO is taking their time in making the decision of which show will get the green light to start production. Fans are still eagerly waiting for that decision because they now have to wait until 2019 to see the final season. Since this show is like no other, it makes sense that the industry and production trends mentioned above are different than the industry and production trends of other shows and to what we learned in class.

I brought up the topic of race in *Game of Thrones* regarding the Unsullied being of a different race than majority of the characters on the show during my focus group. Kate and Aaron said it as by coincidence, not intent, that the army was of a different race. Kate even said, “You only really see a few characters without their helmets, so you don’t know who else is there.” This statement I believe to be valid because the army wears helmets all the time and there are only two characters who have speaking roles that are in the army so they have to take off their helmets to talk since the helmet covers the face. Jim informed me that “In the books, they [Unsullied] are supposed to be slaves taken from all over and made into warriors... They are just brought from all different civilizations.” I didn’t know this I didn’t read the books and it makes sense because when the Unsullied were described in the show they were men taken from villages at a young age to learn to fight. This got me thinking about what Hall said “... ‘framing [of] all competing definitions of reality within [the dominant class’s] sets the limits – mental and structural – within which subordinate classes ‘live’ and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them” (*Hegemony: A Cultural Approach*, 62) because fighting and being in an army is all the Unsullied know since it was how they were brought up. Jim helped me understand the backstory behind them that I would have gotten if I read the books. This relates to Hall’s encoding and decoding model that I briefly mentioned at the beginning of this section because Jim, Aaron, and Kate all feel into fall into all three of his audience positions because depending on what is going on in the show they either interpret it the way that the showrunner wanted, interpret it in a different way than the showrunners wanted, or they interpret some of the messages the showrunners give and not the others. This makes the show interesting because each position will allow the viewers to give different opinions on the show about certain things and it will start debates that people can have with each other. It also shows that people are willing to put extra thought into the show instead of just watching it, they are actively interpreting every little thing that goes on in the show.

The impact that this show has on its audience is incredible, I have never seen a fan-base so dedicated to their show since the *Star Wars* and the *Harry Potter* fan-bases came out. All three have stood the test of time and are going strong. This show has people constantly talking about it with anyone that shows an interest in the show or the books. The consequence of this is that you can have a conversation about *Game of Thrones* anywhere such as a train, bus, airplane and with anyone. This is my favorite consequence of the show and books because it really brings people together over a common interest and you really get to see how people interpret what they saw. Everyone notices different details about a scene and when they point it out, you get to have a conversation about it. Since the show is based off the books, many people like Jim and Aaron criticize that they want the books to come out so that the show can be written around the books again instead of the creators coming up with their own ideas. Although the creators do a fantastic job with it, some people just want more of the book integrated with the show and to keep it true to the books. Some people don’t like how the books are split up between all the characters where in the book it was split up between two characters. The consequence of this is that the fans of the book are more critical of the show than those fans who only watched the show. The people who read the books notice a lot more details that are different in the show compared to how the details are described in the books. This also brings up conversation and debates between the fans and I love it because it is so interesting to hear people go into deep discussions about these things. It

shows that people really care about how the media mediums differ and what makes them different.

Technology plays a major role in my analysis of *Game of Thrones* because of how integrated it is with the show. Technology is used to create the show's special effects including the dragons, the snowy background scenes, the ice walls, and the dragon fire. The special effects rival the special effects seen in feature films and blockbusters. I have never seen a television show that reminds me so much of films because of how it looks visually, and that has everything to do with the cinematography and the visual effects. Technology also plays a role in how people get to view the show and how they interact with other fans. HBOGO is a form of technology that allows viewers to watch all of HBO's programs if they have an account. It also makes people's lives a little easier because they can use HBO on their smart phone, smart TV, and laptop, essentially, they can watch HBO anywhere. The Internet is another form of technology where fans can interact with other fans online through Reddit or they can purchase merchandise of the show on HBO's store or on another website. Technology makes it easier for people to access *Game of Thrones*, whether it be legally or illegally because there are websites that stream the show illegally for downloads, but it can also make watching the show a lot harder. HBOGO has a tendency to crash whenever a new episode comes on because so many people are trying to watch it, but HBO is very aware of this and over the years have fixed the streaming service quickly every time it happens.

Understanding media theory and media traditions are necessary for individuals to know because it provides background to what media professionals are doing. If a person understands communication theory then that person can understand why certain things in media happen the way that they do or that there are certain stereotypes that will always make a reoccurrence in television shows or films. Learning about communication theory will help the individual understand how to interpret media and how to properly analyze it, which is exactly what Kellner wants people to do. By doing this people can get a better comprehension of how media companies get their messages across and how people interpret them differently.

Game of Thrones is a show that started to captivate audiences in 2011 and they are still captivating audiences while gaining more viewership as the years go on. Unfortunately, this amazing and, in my opinion, revolutionary show is coming to an end in 2019. Everything mentioned above is what embodies the show and each individual part helps make the television show unique. The way that *Game of Thrones* is created, although not unique with how other shows get produced, the showrunners and special effects team have made the show stand out on its own because of the storylines that are able to draw people into the show and the special effects team that create cinematic quality special effects. There are a multitude of qualities that make this show one of the best on television right now but I believe that everyone has their own opinion as to why. My only suggestion is that you watch the television show and read the books to have an opinion on this matter and because being a part of the *Game of Thrones* fandom is an experience that people have to have.

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